

## The Vocation to Catholic Higher Education

Earlier this summer, I was privileged to attend the Rome Seminar organized by the American-based Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. The Seminar brings together each year senior administrators from Catholic universities in the United States (also Canada this year) to dialogue with Vatican officials on the nature and mission of Catholic universities. The rigorous, five-day schedule included discussions with archbishops in the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Pontifical Council for the Care of Migrant and Itinerate Peoples, and the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino.

While each of these meetings addressed the Catholic academic tradition and its inherent obligations to students, society and the world, it was a forum at Rome's Pontifical Beda College, "John Henry Newman and the Vocation to Catholic Higher Education" that focussed most directly on the essence of the Catholic university. Inspired by Cardinal Newman's life and prolific scholarship, the discussion centred on the "incarnational vision" of Catholic higher education, a profound interrelationship of faith and reason. The Catholic university "reunite[s] ... things which were in the beginning joined together by God, and have been put asunder by man." The consideration of faith should not be confined to one sphere and the examination of science to another: "the same roof [must] contain both the intellectual and the moral discipline." Nor is there any need for compromise "as if religion must give up something, and science something." In the Catholic university, there must be the utmost freedom for both the intellect and religious belief and "they should be found in one and the same place."

Newman's intersection of faith and reason as the soul of the Catholic university speaks forcefully to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, an era defined by Pope Benedict XVI in his July 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), as demanding a new world financial order guided by ethics, the overall well being of humanity and careful attention to justice. The Catholic university in which "the intellectual and the moral discipline" reside in a dynamic, symbiotic relationship is uniquely positioned to confront this challenge of a shaken global economy that apparently defies narrowly conceived, conventional economic wisdom. The belief that people are not merely consumers or producers, that we are spiritual beings, and there are ethical and moral dimensions to all that we do is reflected in the nature, mission and programs of the Catholic university. This, and the commitment to a learning ethos that inspires students to pursue vigorously responsible intellectual inquiry, prepares graduates for the obligation to strive for an ethical, socially just world based on sound moral principles.

In the case of St, Mary's University College, this educational philosophy takes the very concrete form of mandatory courses in ethics, theology and interdisciplinary studies in all undergraduate degree programs. These requirements reflect Pope

John Paul II in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*: “to explore courageously the riches of Revelation and of nature so that the united endeavour of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity.”

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